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## HOUSING AND

## YOUR COMMUNITY

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Some of the considerations that led to the provision of Federal aid to local communities for slum clearance and low-rent housing.

SLUMS HAVE LONG BEEN a serious drain upon our civic prestige, our civic well-being, and our civic pocketbooks. Since the turn of the century the problem has been a major one for communities all over the country.

Good housing is one of the fundamental necessities of life. When homes are indecent or inadequate, the welfare of individuals and of the community at large is as severely threatened as it is by inadequate food or scanty clothing.

Practically no community in America is free from the curse of substandard housing. Yet without assistance, no local government, much less private enterprise, has been able to tear down slums and build decent low-rent dwellings for families of low income.

The year 1937 brought the first ray of hope to millions of slum-dwellers and to scores of local governments engulfed in the housing dilemma. For in that year Congress set up the United States Housing Authority as a permanent agency to help local communities carry out slum clearance and rehousing programs. USHA loans and annual contributions toward low rents were made available

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for approved projects which the localities themselves build and manage.

As a result, local governments from one end of the country to the other began to reexamine their housing problems in a more hopeful spirit. Many of them saw at once that, with Federal aid available, to allow slums to remain would be as unwise economically as it would be morally and socially unjustifiable. Their records showed that millions of dollars of the taxpayers' money were being spent every year to alleviate the social ills arising from slums, without doing anything to prevent their recurrence or to get rid of bad housing.

Other communities turned to the records and made surveys of their housing needs. The questions they asked, in weighing the values of public housing and in planning rehousing programs, are questions every alert and forward-looking citizen may well ask about his own community.

### **First, how serious is the housing problem in your town?**

Unless your community is a twentieth century wonder, it has its share of low-income families who live in miserable, dilapidated houses because no better dwellings are available at rents they can afford to pay. Over the Nation as a whole, it has been estimated that at least a third of the population live under conditions that menace their physical welfare and their safety.

If yours is a large city, you can drive through the industrial part of town and see slums that stick out like sore thumbs. Tenement districts and "shack towns" along the railroad tracks are easy to identify as substandard areas. You'll see structures so rundown that they stand in danger of collapsing if they escape going up in flames.

As you drive away from outright slums, nine chances out of ten you'll run into once respectable neighborhoods that are just beginning to yield to the encroachment of slums. You'll find dwellings that were originally built for single families, but which now bear six or eight doorbells that hint of

the sunless, ill-ventilated, overcrowded living quarters inside. You'll see cheerless old houses lined up side by side, ready to go the way of all blighted areas.

If you stop to inquire, you're likely to discover families who are so afraid of being evicted that high rent bills are paid first of all when the pay check comes in, even before food is bought.



But the extent of bad housing in your town isn't fully measured by the obvious slum areas, particularly if your community is small or of average size. Windowless rooms, sagging floors and leaking roofs, and inadequate sanitary facilities are not so easily observed.

From 1934 to 1937 a survey of the housing in more than 200 localities was made by the United States Department of Commerce and the Works Progress Administration. The results of this investigation, which covered more than 8 million households or the homes of about half the urban families in the United States, aroused widespread concern.

About 1,100,000 of the homes surveyed were found to be dangerously unsafe or absolutely unfit for people to live in. Some 1,666,000 dwellings lacked private bathing facilities, and 1,221,000 had no private indoor toilet. About 1,325,000 homes were crowded—that is, had more people than there were rooms.

The figures for some communities were even more shocking than those on a Nation-wide scale. Here are the results, picked at random, for a few cities in various parts of the country.

More than a fourth of all the residential buildings in Atlanta, Ga., Wheeling, W. Va., and Butte, Mont., were not fit to live in or needed major repairs.

A third or more of all the homes in Columbia, S. C., Frederick, Md., and Zanesville, Ohio, had no private indoor toilet. Nearly half of all the households in Birmingham, Ala., Charleston, S. C., and Paducah, Ky., lacked private baths.



In general, housing in these cities is neither better nor worse than in other communities. The significant thing is that, without exception, every one of them has joined the long list of localities that have turned to the USHA for financial and technical assistance in developing public housing projects.

### **Second, how much do slums cost your town?**

Every community that has looked into the records has come to the same conclusion about the cost of slums. Areas of substandard housing invariably call for an *extra* amount of ordinary municipal services because of the excess sickness and death, the great amount of delinquency and crime, and the all-too-frequent fires in slum neighborhoods.

Overcrowding, lack of sunlight, poor ventilation, and inadequate sanitary facilities in slum homes lead to the occurrence and easy communication of disease. The rates of infant mortality, rickets, tuberculosis, and pneumonia, among others, are consistently higher in substandard housing areas

than in better neighborhoods. This makes the city clinic, the city hospital, and other public health services costly items in the local budget.

Lack of play facilities and adequate supervision, cramped, unsatisfactory home life, and inadequate privacy are common to slum housing. Such circumstances make it easy for young people to go wrong. Behind most adult criminals are backgrounds as juvenile delinquents. Here again local governments have to step in and foot the bill for truant officers, social workers, and police. Juvenile courts, settlement houses, detention homes, and jails have to be maintained.

Dilapidated frame structures and congested tenements demand constant attention from local fire departments, in addition to causing needless loss of life.

A Hartford study showed that slum areas occupying a tenth of the area of the city house a fourth of the city's population. From these slum areas came 51 percent of all tuberculosis cases, 57 percent of all juvenile delinquency, and 62½ percent of all arrests for adult delinquency.

This is what a study made in Cleveland showed:

Area	Per capita cost for fire protection	Per capita cost for police protection	Per capita cost for public health work
One large slum area.	\$18.27	\$11.50	\$2.02
Rest of city.....	3.12	4.20	0.64

Each of these cities, and scores of others that have examined local budgets realistically, view public housing as their great hope. They realize that while the decent new housing being built with USHA assistance will not completely solve the social problems that face them, it will do much to lessen the terrible toll of the slums and to keep the necessity for expensive public services at a minimum.

### **Third, what is private enterprise doing to meet your town's housing needs?**

Slum-dwellers who have walked the streets vainly searching for dwellings large enough to insure comfort and privacy for their families, at rents that do not unduly strain modest budgets, know the answer to this question from tragic experience.

While home building for whatever income group has been scant enough in recent years, practically no houses have been constructed that low-income families could afford.

Toledo is typical of the low-rent housing plight of many an American city. In the past decade, of some 2,700 dwellings that have been built, less than 10 percent could possibly have been rented by families of small means. During the same period it is estimated that at least 800 dwellings were torn down, and the city's population increased by some 18,000 families.

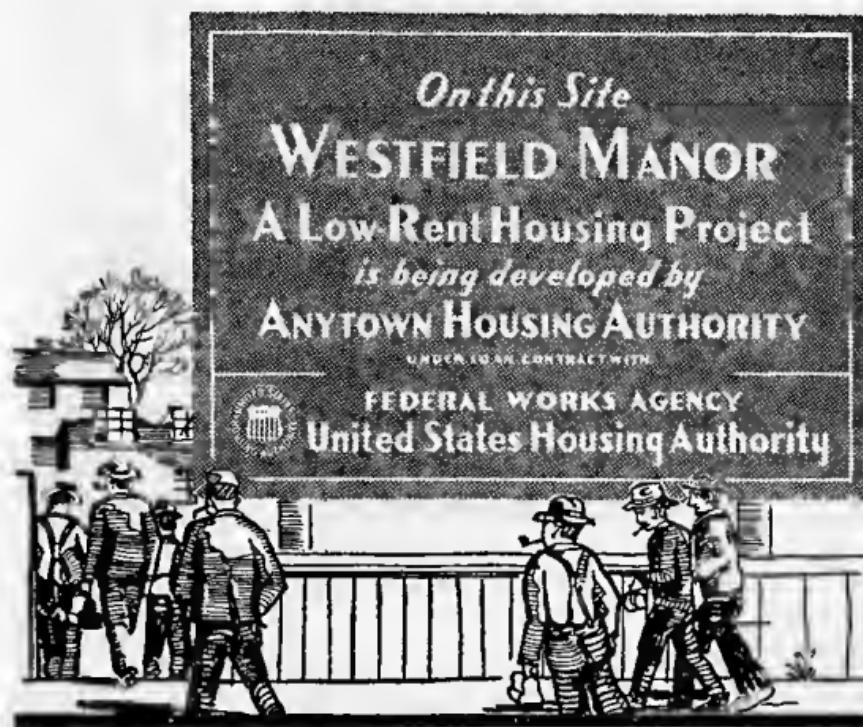
In general, private builders have served families in the upper third of the urban housing market. Housing projects built with USHA aid are designed to reach only families in the lowest income groups. Public housing thus offers no threat of competition with the private builder. Instead, the construction of USHA-assisted projects is actually stimulating much private building in the vicinity of projects, for middle-income families suddenly awakened to the inadequacy of their own homes.

### **Fourth, do men need jobs in your town?**

In most communities, the answer to this question is the most obvious of all. Building trades workers, in particular, have been hard hit by the lag in construction in recent years.

Public housing is creating jobs both directly and indirectly. The immediate program local communities are undertaking means jobs for thousands of men at project sites, at prevailing wages and under good conditions.

Indirectly, the program is creating employment for half again as many people—in mines, mills, offices, factories, and in other jobs having to do with the manufacture and transportation of building materials.



Millions of dollars of increased purchasing power in the hands of those who are getting jobs mean increased sales for grocery stores, clothing shops, and all lines of local retail trade. Public housing is, in short, beginning to get the wheels of prosperity turning in one community after another.

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Most communities, when they have the answers to these questions, lose no time in working out slum clearance and rehousing programs. That is why more than 440 local communities to date have set up housing authorities through whom USHA-assisted projects can be built.

Nearly half of them—large cities and small, and even rural regions—have already obtained USHA commitments and are now planning, constructing, or actually operating low-rent projects. For every home built with USHA aid, at least one substandard dwelling in the community is being torn down, closed, or repaired.

Within the past two and a half years the pioneer days of the public housing movement have given way to the days of a new frontier—a frontier on which thousands of modern low-rent dwellings have already been built. Under the immediate program, about 160,000 families from the slums will move into pleasant new homes at rents that are no more, and sometimes even less, than they are now paying for substandard quarters.

If public housing is to advance beyond the frontier stage, it must challenge the public spirit of individuals in every community in which there are slum families living unhealthful, maladjusted lives. It must awaken every community to the fact that slum clearance and low-rent housing are the means to a healthier, happier, more productive citizenship.

*This leaflet is one of a series on various phases of the United States Housing Authority program. For additional copies of this leaflet, or for copies of others in this series, write to the:*

FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY  
UNITED STATES HOUSING AUTHORITY  
WASHINGTON, D. C.



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